
AP[®] United States History

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 2

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Long Essay Question 3

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Question 3: Long Essay Question, Sectional Tensions and U.S. Society

6 points

General Scoring Notes

- Except where otherwise noted, each point of these rubrics is earned independently; for example, a student could earn a point for evidence without earning a point for thesis/claim.
- **Accuracy:** The components of these rubrics require that students demonstrate historically defensible content knowledge. Given the timed nature of the exam, essays may contain errors that do not detract from their overall quality, as long as the historical content used to advance the argument is accurate.
- **Clarity:** Exam essays should be considered first drafts and thus may contain grammatical errors. Those errors will not be counted against a student unless they obscure the successful demonstration of the content knowledge, skills, and practices described below.

Evaluate how sectional tensions shaped United States society from 1800 to 1848.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Thesis/Claim (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Responds to the prompt with a historically defensible thesis/claim that establishes a line of reasoning.
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Are not historically defensible. - Only restate or rephrase the prompt. - Do not respond to the prompt. - Do not establish a line of reasoning. - Are overgeneralized.	Responses that earn this point: Provide a historically defensible thesis or claim about how sectional tensions shaped United States society from 1800 to 1848. The thesis or claim must either provide some indication of the reason for making that claim OR establish categories of the argument.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Provide a restatement of the prompt <i>“Sectional tensions shaped United States society from 1800 to 1848.”</i> Provide a historically defensible claim, but do not establish a line of reasoning <i>“Sectional tensions were high during this time.”</i> Provide a claim that is not historically defensible <i>“By the mid-1800s, major sectional differences had been resolved.”</i>	Examples that earn this point: Establish a line of reasoning that evaluates the topic of the prompt <i>“Sectional tensions over slavery and economic development led to a growing divide between the South, and the North and West.”</i> Establish a line of reasoning that evaluates the topic of the prompt with analytic categories <i>“Sectional tensions had political and social effects, such as in the development of third parties and the growth in divides within reform movements.”</i> Establish a line of reasoning <i>“Sectional tensions over slavery divided United States society between 1800 and 1848.”</i> [Minimally acceptable thesis/claim]
Additional Notes: - The thesis or claim must consist of one or more sentences located in one place, either in the introduction or the conclusion (which may not be limited to the first or last paragraphs). - The thesis or claim must identify a relevant development(s) in the period, although it is not required to encompass the entire period.		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row B Contextualization	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Describes a broader historical context relevant to the prompt.
(0–1 points)	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: • Provide an overgeneralized statement about the time period referenced in the prompt. • Provide context that is not relevant to the prompt. • Provide a passing phrase or reference.	Responses that earn this point: • Accurately describe a context relevant to sectional tensions and United States society from 1800 to 1848.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Do not provide context relevant to the topic of the prompt • <i>“People found a lot of religion during the First Great Awakening.”</i> Provide a passing phrase or reference • <i>“Sectionalism was part of United States society.”</i>	Examples of relevant context that earn this point include the following, if appropriate elaboration is provided: • Transatlantic slave trade • Various colonial regions • American Revolution • Constitutional Convention • Northwest Ordinance • Manifest Destiny • Republican Party • Abraham Lincoln • Civil War Example of acceptable contextualization: • <i>“The Northwest Ordinance set a precedent for which regions slavery could and could not expand into in the future.”</i> • <i>“Slavery was an ongoing and heavily debated topic during the Constitutional Convention.”</i> [Minimally acceptable contextualization]
	Additional Notes: • The response must describe broader historical events, developments, or processes that occur before, during, or continue after the time frame of the question that are relevant to the topic of the prompt. • To earn this point, the context provided must be more than a phrase or reference.	

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria		
Row C Evidence (0–2 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Provides specific examples of at least two pieces of evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt.	2 points Supports an argument in response to the prompt using at least two pieces of specific and relevant evidence.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn points: - Identify a single piece of evidence. - Provide evidence that is not relevant to the topic of the prompt. - Provide evidence that is outside the time period or region specified in the prompt. - Repeat information that is specified in the prompt. Examples that do not earn points: Repeat information that is specified in the prompt <i>“There was sectional tension in the United States.”</i>	Responses that earn 1 point: - Identify at least two specific historical examples relevant to sectional tensions and United States society from 1800 to 1848. Examples of evidence that are specific and relevant include the following (two examples required): - Transportation infrastructure [e.g., turnpikes, canals, railroads, and steamboats] - Northern industrialization / Southern plantation economy - Specific political parties [Federalists, Democratic-Republicans, Whigs, etc.] - Institution of slavery - Abolitionism - Frederick Douglass - William Lloyd Garrison - Market revolution - Second Bank of the United States - President Andrew Jackson - Nullification Crisis - Henry Clay / American System - Nativism - Missouri Compromise [1820] - Annexation of Texas - Mexican-American War Example of a statement that earns one point for evidence: <i>“Many southern states opposed a variety of federal policies like the Second Bank of the United States. Southern states also argued against attempts to restrict the expansion of slavery.”</i>	Responses that earn 2 points: - Use at least two specific historical examples to support an argument regarding how sectional tensions shaped United States society from 1800 to 1848. Examples that successfully support an argument with evidence: <i>“Sectional tensions regarding slavery led to the growth of abolitionist organizations and newspapers, such as The Liberator by William Lloyd Garrison.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about the effect of sectional tensions on reform organizations and movements] <i>“Regional divisions within the Whig Party over the expansion of slavery resulted in the party beginning to collapse during the 1840s, as it lost support to the newly formed Free Soil Party, which sought to restrict slavery from western territories.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about the impact of sectional tensions on the dissolution of political parties] <i>“During the Nullification Crisis, Southern Democrats argued that states had the right to nullify federal laws that they didn’t like, and this led to a major confrontation over the ‘Tariff of Abominations’.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about how sectional tensions regarding federal power led to political controversies]

	Additional Notes: • Typically, statements credited as evidence will be more specific than statements credited as contextualization. • If a response has a multipart argument, then it can meet the threshold of two pieces of evidence by giving one example for one part of the argument and another example for a different part of the argument, but the total number of examples must still be at least two.
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Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria		
Row D Analysis and Reasoning (0-2 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Uses historical reasoning [e.g. comparison, causation, continuity and change] to frame or structure an argument that addresses the prompt.	2 points Demonstrates a complex understanding of the historical development that is the focus of the prompt through sophisticated argumentation and/or effective use of evidence.
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes			
	Responses that do not earn points: - May include evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to an argument. - May assert the use of historical reasoning but does not use it to frame or structure an argument. Examples that do not earn points: Provide evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to an argument <i>“Henry Clay advocated for the American System.”</i>	Responses that earn 1 point: - Must demonstrate the use of historical reasoning to frame or structure an argument about how sectional tensions shaped United States society from 1800 to 1848. The reasoning might be uneven or imbalanced, or the evidence may be overly general or lacking specificity. Using a historical reasoning process to frame or structure an argument could include: - Explaining how sectional tensions related to the economy shaped society, specifically those involving slavery, which increased over the course of the period, culminating in sharp divisions over the Mexican American War. - Explaining how sectional tensions over slavery shaped approaches to reform movements in the North and the South. Example of acceptable use of historical reasoning: <i>“Sectional tensions related to the expansion of slavery remained constant throughout this period, as the harsh political debates over the Missouri</i>	Responses that earn 2 points: May demonstrate a complex understanding through sophisticated argumentation that is relevant to the prompt. This may be done in a variety of ways, such as: - Explaining multiple themes or perspectives to explore complexity or nuance; OR - Explaining multiple causes or effects, multiple similarities or differences, or multiple continuities or changes; OR - Explaining both cause and effect, both similarity and difference, or both continuity and change; OR - Explaining relevant and insightful connections within and across periods or geographical areas. These connections should clearly relate to an argument that responds to the prompt. May demonstrate a complex understanding through effective use of evidence relevant to an argument that addresses the prompt. This may be done in a variety of ways that might include: - Explaining how multiple pieces of specific and relevant evidence [at least four] support a nuanced or complex argument that responds to the prompt; OR - Using evidence effectively to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of different perspectives relevant to the prompt. Demonstrating a complex understanding might include any of the following, if appropriate elaboration is provided: - A response may argue that sectional tensions shaped the economic development of United States by pointing out the differences between the industrializing North and the plantation economy of the South. It then qualifies that claim by explaining how even though sectional tensions contributed to economic differences, the dependency of those regions on each other’s products also had the effect of reducing sectionalism in parts of society. [Explains multiple effects] - A response may argue that sectional tensions over slavery led to debates between groups that advocated for the expansion of slavery and groups that advocated for “free soil.” It then provides evidence that industrialization in the North also contributed to regional

	<i>Compromise and the Mexican Cession demonstrate.” [Indicates a continuity in the effects of sectional tension over the period]</i>	economic differences that also impacted sectional tensions. [Explains both cause and effect] • A response may argue that sectional tensions had varied effects during this period as political parties such as the Whigs and the Democrats tried to keep the country unified, but the emergence of new third parties in the 1840s, such as the Free Soil Party at the very end of the period, further drove sectional tensions. [Explains both continuity and change]
Additional Notes: • To earn the first point for analysis and reasoning, the response must use historical reasoning to structure a response to the prompt, although the reasoning might be uneven or imbalanced, or the evidence may be overly general or lacking in specificity. • This complex understanding must be part of the argument and may be demonstrated in any part of the response. • While it is not necessary for this complex understanding to be woven throughout the response, it must be more than merely a phrase or reference.		

In the late 18th century, the Middle Passage was used to transport African slaves to the Americas. In the Southern and Chesapeake regions especially, large tobacco and rice plantations relied on slave labor for crop production. Though slavery was still present in the North, key industries like fishing and boating required less slave labor. Throughout the early colonial years, the North's diversified economy mitigated their reliance on slavery, while the South's plantation economy and reliance on "King Cotton" increased their dependency on African Slaves. During the 19th century, westward expansion and the annexation of Texas led to more debates on the institution of slavery. As a result of this, sectional tensions in the United States in the pre-Civil War era led to increased political debates over the expansion of slavery into the western territories between the North and the South.

The annexation of Texas increased tensions over the issue of slavery in the newly acquired western territories. Texas had recently gained independence from Mexico, and now requested to be admitted as a slave state to the Union of the U.S. This sparked intense debates over the expansion of slavery in western territories, particularly because northerners feared they would lose political power in the federal government. Had Texas been admitted as a slave state without an additional free state to counteract its political influence, northern outrage could have led to a premature civil war. Additionally, the notion of popular sovereignty in western territories directly contrasts with the northern Free Soil Party, which was against the expansion of slavery into the territories. Popular sovereignty is the idea that the people of a territory should determine whether they are admitted as a slave state or a free state. The conflict between these two philosophies further underscores the causes for the growing tensions among the North and South prior to the Civil War. The dichotomy between freesoilers and those supporting popular sovereignty illustrates how the prospect of slavery expanding into the territories influenced predominate ideologies in American society.

Fear of an imbalance in political power led the northern states to favor preventing the expansion of slavery, and a desire for increased political sway led the southern states to favor the expansion of slavery into the western territories. Such concerns were especially evident in the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which led to the admission of Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a Free State. The compromise also outlawed slavery in territories above the northern border of Missouri. This compromise, led by Henry Clay, illustrates an early example of the tensions due to slavery. Fear of power imbalances in the Senate and House of Representatives were the key issue in this compromise, underscoring the influence sectional tensions had on influencing Northerners' ideals from 1800 to 1848. Additionally, the compromise's implications for the future of slavery in America were convoluted, as freesoil and popular sovereignty ideals began conflicting. Instead of solving the issue of slavery, the Missouri Compromise postponed it, thus further contributing to sectional tensions between the North and South.

Ultimately, instances like the admission of Texas into the Union and the Missouri Compromise underscore the increasing sectional tensions between northern and southern states. As the two regions of the U.S. continued to disagree over the institution of slavery, tensions grew, and ultimately capitulated during the Civil War during the 1860s. By 1848, sectional tensions pitted the two regions' against each other, especially through political attempts to gain power for each respective side.

Between 1800-1848, the United States was progressing rapidly. The two major regions of the US, the North and the South, were friendly to each other. The two sides, however, had completely different structures. This led to rising tensions between the two sides, which would eventually lead to violent conflict. In 1800-1848, regional differences such as beliefs over slavery and differences in economic practices would start to create tensions, which would dramatically cause a change in society.

One of, if not the most important factors that created tensions that shaped society in this time period was the beliefs over slavery. In the north, slavery was not used at all, whereas the south relied heavily on slave labor and still held the belief that slavery was a god-given right. This shows that slavery had a huge impact on creating tension. The north and the south had opposite views on slavery, which individually shaped their societies. This, in turn, created tension between the two sides, impacting American society as a whole.

Another factor that contributed to this was the different levels of development between the two regions. The north was starting to focus on manufacturing, while the south was still using slave labor. Furthermore, the north had better infrastructure, as they had started developing railroads. This created conflict since the two regions each believed their way of life was superior to the other region's. This created tensions between the two, which significantly impacted society as a whole.

These tensions would continue to shape American society for far longer than this period. Violent conflicts over these tensions, such as Bleeding Kansas, as well as the election of Abraham Lincoln for president, would lead to a civil war due to these sectional tensions. Even after the civil war when the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendment were passed, African Americans still faced discrimination. This goes to show how much the regional tensions between the North and the South in the time period from 1800-1848 would shape American society not only in that time period, but also far into the future from that time period.

Sectional tensions from 1800 to 1848 shaped US society into what it is today. The civil tensions over slavery land and government eventually lead to the civil war which caused a major rift between the northern and southern united states. This rift was caused by the varying opinions of Americans on slaverys eventual downfall and how new land bought and gained pre civil war, became a direct factor to the United States division.

Slavery was becoming a thing of the past in the North and was needed to keep the Southern economy running. After the 40 6 40 line was created, slavery was not allowed North of this line but was continued in the South, the southern slave states wanted more slavery and more fuel to their economy while the North wanted to distance themselves from the cruel practice.

With this division along with other incidents like slave rebellions and more equality being major conflicts in the country, the US got closer and closer to dividing until they split. This split shaped the country into a two part system with opposing views and fueling incidents.

Long Essay Question 3

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

NEW for 2025: The question overviews can be found in the *Chief Reader Report on Student Responses* on [AP Central](#).

Sample: 3A

Thesis Score: 1

Contextualization Score: 1

Evidence Score: 2

Analysis and Reasoning Score: 2

Total Score: 6

A. Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for thesis because it provides a historically defensible claim that establishes a line of reasoning in the last sentence of the first paragraph: “sectional tensions in the United States in the pre-Civil War era led to increased political debates over the expansion of slavery into the western territories between the North and the South.”

B. Contextualization (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for contextualization in the first paragraph with the references to the Middle Passage, the institution of slavery in the South, and the North’s gradual abandonment of slavery.

C. Evidence (0–2 points): 2

The response earned 1 point for using evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt. For example, the response accurately describes the annexation of Texas, the Free Soil Party, and the Missouri Compromise.

The response earned the second point for using evidence to support an argument. The argument that westward expansion increased political debates over the expansion of slavery into the western territories is supported with an explanation of the impact of popular sovereignty and the Free Soil Party, as well as the tension causing the creation of the Missouri Compromise.

D. Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 2

The response earned 1 point for using a variety of historical reasoning skills to frame or structure an argument that addresses the prompt. For example, the second paragraph compares the goals of the Free Soil Party with the concept of popular sovereignty to show differences, and the third paragraph explains how the Missouri Compromise caused an increase in tensions between the North and South.

Long Essay Question 3 (continued)

The response earned the second point for demonstrating a complex understanding by explaining multiple effects of westward expansion. Additionally, the response demonstrates a complex understanding by using four pieces of evidence to support a complex argument about growing sectional tensions with evidence of “King Cotton,” the annexation of Texas, the Missouri Compromise, and the Free Soil Party. The response earned the second point for demonstrating a complex understanding by explaining multiple effects of westward expansion. Additionally, the response demonstrates a complex understanding by using four pieces of evidence to support a complex argument about growing sectional tensions with evidence of “King Cotton,” the annexation of Texas, the Missouri Compromise, and the Free Soil Party.

Sample: 3B**Thesis Score: 1****Contextualization Score: 1****Evidence Score: 1****Analysis and Reasoning Score: 1****Total Score: 4****A. Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1**

The response earned 1 point for thesis because the last sentence in the first paragraph establishes a historically defensible claim that establishes a line of reasoning: “In 1800-1848, regional differences such as beliefs over slavery and differences in economic practices would start to create tensions, which would dramatically cause a change in society.”

B. Contextualization (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for contextualization in the last paragraph. Examples of contextualization after the time frame of the prompt include Bleeding Kansas, the election of Lincoln, and the Reconstruction Amendments.

C. Evidence (0–2 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for using evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt. The response discusses the growth of slavery in the South in the second paragraph and the North’s emphasis on manufacturing and infrastructure, such as railroads, in the third paragraph.

The response did not earn the point for using the evidence in support of an argument. The evidence provided is described but not used in support of an argument.

D. Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for using the historical reasoning skill of comparison to structure an argument by discussing in the third paragraph how economic differences between the North and South led to sectional tensions.

The response did not earn the point for demonstrating a complex understanding because the attempts to explain multiple perspectives lack nuance.

Long Essay Question 3 (continued)**Sample: 3C****Thesis Score: 1****Contextualization Score: 0****Evidence Score: 0****Analysis and Reasoning Score: 0****Total Score: 1****A. Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1**

The response earned 1 point for thesis because it provides a historically defensible claim that establishes a minimally acceptable line of reasoning, arguing that “Sectional tensions” shaped United States society through “varying opinions of Americans on slaverys eventual downfall and how new land bought and gained pre civil war.”

B. Contextualization (0–1 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for contextualization. There is an attempt at contextualization with the reference to the Civil War in the second sentence, but it is a passing reference rephrasing the thesis in the following sentence.

C. Evidence (0–2 points): 0

The response earned 0 points for describing at least two pieces of evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt. The attempts to identify the “40 6 40 line” and “slave rebellions” are either historically inaccurate or too vague.

The response did not earn 1 point for using at least two pieces of evidence to support an argument in response to the prompt.

D. Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for using historical reasoning to frame or structure an argument that addresses the prompt. Although there is an attempt to compare the northern and southern economies, it is merely a vague reference.

The response did not earn the point for demonstrating a complex understanding because it makes no attempt at sophisticated argumentation or effective use of evidence.